

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 /070 W
-----030640Z 049467 /10

R 021515Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6969
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3873

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, TS
SUBJECT: GOT SCHEDULES TRIAL OF BEN SALAHISTS FOR JUNE 13

REF: TUNIS 1819, TUNIS 2892

1. GOT-CONTROLLED DAILY LA PRESSE REPORTED ON MAY 28 THAT IT HAD LEARNED THQE STATE SECURITY COURT WILL BEGIN ON JUNE 13 THE TRIAL OF 23 BEN SALAHISTS ARRESTED LAST MARCH. LA PRESSE RECALLED THAT THE POLICE HAD DISCOVERED THE CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATION TO WHICH THEY BELONGED AFTER THE CIRCULATION OF ANTI-REGIME TRACTS AND A NEWSPAPER CALLED "POPULAR UNITY."

2. A DEFENSE LAWYER FOR SOME OF THE ACCUSED TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO ASK FOR THE DEATH SENTENCE BUT HE DID NOT KNOW QWHICH OF THE DEFENDANTS MIGHT BE SUBJECT TO THIS PUNISHMENT. THE LAWYER ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE NUMBER OF PERSONS TO BE TRIED IS 22, INDICATING THAT ONE OF THE 23 PERSONS ARRESTED BY THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN DROPPED FROM THE INDICTMENT. FOUR PERSONS (INCLUDING AHMED BAN SALAH) WILL BE TRIED "IN ABSENTIA."

3. THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TRIAL
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DATE, BUT LA PRESSE'S LINKS WITH THE GOT GIVE THE NEWS IT PUBLISHED ON MAY 28 A SEMI-OFFICIAL CHARACTER. IT IS INTERESTING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BEGIN THIS TRIAL, WHICH IS CERTAIN TO CAUSE CONTROVESY, THREE DAYS AFTER THE SCHEDULED OPENING OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCEON PUBLIC LIBERTIES (SEE TUNIS 3062) ORGANIZED BY THE "LIBERAL/SOCIAL DEMOCRAT" OPPOSITION GROUP. ACCORDING

TO TUNISIAN LAW, A REQUEST FOR AN OFFICIAL PERMIT FOR A PUBLIC MEETING CANNOT BE SUBMITTED UNTIL THREE DAYS BEFORE ITS PROPOSED OPENING DAY. TO DATE THE GOT HAS SIDESTEPED QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER AUTHORIZATION WILL BE GRANTED FOR THE CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC LIBERTIES BY SAYING THAT NO OFFICIAL REQUEST HAS BEEN RECEIVED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TRIALS, DISSIDENT FACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 02-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TUNIS03873
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770197-1323
Format: TEL
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770696/aaaadgbp.tel
Line Count: 69
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d1ee4086-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 TUNIS 1819, 77 TUNIS 2892
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2297792
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOT SCHEDULES TRIAL OF BEN SALAHISTS FOR JUNE 13
TAGS: PINT, PINS, TS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d1ee4086-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009